

ENTERTAINMENT

Four premieres open in New Year

Mid-season theatre booms.

Theatergoers in Portland will have four major productions to choose from during the month of January. All four open on January 6; they are A.M. Collins' *Angry Housewives*, at Storefront; Sam Shepard's *The Curse of the Starving Class*, directed by Peter Fornara at Critical Mass Theatre; *Christmas at Juniper Tavern* by Charles Deemer, a New Roe Theatre production at the Wilson Center for the Performing Arts; and Portland Civic Theatre's *The Dining Room* by A.R. Gurney, Jr.

Christmas at Juniper Tavern is a comedy about a clash of cultures, a small-town logging culture of Central Oregon and a transplanted Oriental religious culture similar to the red-clad inhabitants of Rajneeshpuram.

Playwright Charles Deemer, author of *Christmas at Juniper Tavern* says "The Antelope affair did inspire my thinking about conflicts of this kind. Rather than relying on what was happening in Central Oregon, however, I used artistic license and a long interest in the comic tradition in Zen to create a situation more useful to my purposes

Swami Kree is played by director Steve Smith who appeared last season in Deemer's *The Half-Life Conspiracy* at NRT. Smith has also directed the premiere of two other Deemer plays, *The Pardon* and *Country Northwestern* at Theatre Workshop.

Rex, an unemployed mill-worker, is played by Gary Brickner-Schulz; Rex's friend Frank will be played by Rollie Wulf; and Joanna Malandrucolo will play his wife Margie. Vana O'Brien appears as Stella, owner of the Juniper Tavern; Karen Voss plays Ann, a young woman who has come from Portland to join the Kree; and Elaine Edstom plays her mother, Joy. Jane Titus is cast as Ma Prama Rama Kree, the Swami's personal secretary.

And playwright Charles Deemer will play Sheriff Billy, Sheriff of Juniper County, for the opening weekend only, with B. Joe Medley playing the sheriff for the remainder of the run.

Christmas at Juniper Tavern opens January 6 and runs through February 4; it will be performed at the Wilson Center for the Performing Arts in the YWCA, 1111 SW 10th Avenue. Curtain is at 8 pm Thursday-Saturday and at 7 pm on Sundays. All seats are \$7. Call 222-2487.

Angry Housewives, Storefront's Oregon premiere, is a musical comedy about four middle class women in their thirties who form a punk rock band. The women are played by Nancy Benner, Marita Keys, Sharon Knorr and Wendy Westerwelle. Others in the cast are R. Dee, Dean Hutchinson, and Gregg Tamblyn. *Angry Housewives* is directed by Susan Sweeney.

During a *Betty Jean* cosmetics party given by Bev, a recent widow struggling to make ends meet, the four friends see a flyer for a punk rock contest at the Lewd Fingers Club. The only song they know is *Kum-by-ya* and they don't know the first thing about punk rock, but they decide that the \$1000 prize money is more than they will ever get from selling cosmetics to each other.

They call themselves the *Angry Housewives* and start practicing with an accordion, a bass drum, and an acoustic guitar. But within a week, the women get different instruments, write their punk song, work on their attitudes and get their costumes together.

It is after their appearance at Lewd Fingers that the complications begin.

Angry Housewives had its world premiere at Seattle's Pioneer Square Theatre last April and is still running there. Storefront's production will be the second in the country.

Angry Housewives opens January 6 and plays Thursday-Sunday. Curtain is at 8 pm Thursday-Saturday and 7 pm on Sunday. Tickets are \$7 on Thursday and Sunday and \$8 on Friday and Saturday. Call 244-4001 for reservations.



Charles Deemer's *Christmas at Juniper Tavern* with Gary Brickner-Schulz, and Steve Smith as Swami Kree.

Portland audiences will once again have the opportunity to view American life through the eyes of Sam Shepard when Sirius Productions brings *The Curse of the Starving Class* to the Critical Mass Theatre in January. Peter Fornara, lauded for his work in Shepard's *Buried Child* and *True West*, will direct and act in the production. The cast will feature Carol Holden, Tim Streeter, Kelly Brooks, Gary L. Cole and director Fornara.

The production, which opens January 6, will run Thursday-Saturday at 8 pm, and Sunday at 7 pm. Critical Mass Theatre is located at 938 NW Everett. Call 244-9481 for reservations.

Sam Shepard, born in Fort Sheridan, Illinois in 1943, spent his formative years on military bases in South Dakota, Utah, Florida, and the South Pacific before settling on an avocado ranch in California. Moved by Kerouac and the "beat" generation, Shepard migrated to NYC in the late '50s and began to write while working in a nightclub. His western roots emerged in his first play to be produced, *Cowboys*.

Shepard was influenced early by his father's interest in music, and later by the jazz environment in which he lived and worked. His aspirations were in rock-and-roll (he played briefly with the Holy Modal Rounders in the late '60s); the more successful of his early works were involved to some extent with music: *Cowboy Mouth* (written in collaboration with soon-to-be rock-and-roller Patti Smith), *Angel City* (described by Shepard as verbal jazz improvisation), *Suicide in B flat*, *Mad Dog Blues*, and *Tooth of Crime*.

Shepard's later works deal with typically moral (also typically Shepard) themes: good against evil, strong versus weak, the dissolution of the family, the destruction of the American dream. The latter is especially evident to the greatest extent in *The Curse of the Starving Class*, but also in *Buried Child* and *True West*; in all three the American dream lost is a connection to the land.

Sam Shepard has written a sizeable number of plays in a relatively short career: at the age of forty he has had over 30 different works produced and shows no sign of slowing down. Three plays that are somewhat linked thematically and in popularity — also

by the fact that after January they will all have been produced in Portland — are *The Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*.

The Curse of the Starving Class had its premiere on March 2, 1978 at the New York Shakespeare Festival, presented by Joseph Papp. The Portland premiere will be at the Critical Mass Theatre on January 6, 1984, presented by Sirius Productions. As it is the least produced of the three plays it should prove to be a rare treat.

Portland Civic Theatre's Blue Room offering on January 6 is the Oregon premiere of A.R. Gurney, Jr.'s *The Dining Room*. The cast includes Richard Morley, Tom Klug, Douglas Mouw, Marla Kaufmann, Jean Miller and Dee Dee Van Zyl. Jerry Leith directs. The cast of six portrays a wide range of characters numbering 57.

"Nobody comes near a dining room anymore... Nowadays people eat in kitchens, or in living rooms, standing around, balancing their plate like jugglers. Soon they'll be eating in bathrooms. Well, why not?" Thus broods one of the characters in the highly acclaimed, Off-Broadway hit *The Dining Room*, a richly woven, imaginative, affectionate and often hilarious look at a vanishing breed — the American upper middle class. Set in a dining room, which becomes an emblem for an entire culture, Gurney's play is a delightful series of vignettes involving an assortment of families and characters of all ages and generations. There is the humorless patriarch, who is called from supper to defend his brother's honor at the country club... the laconic Wall Street executive and his bedraggled daughter, conferring at the table about her recent flight from her husband... two prep-school girls plotting a gin-vodka-and-Fresca party, and more. The comedy is by turns subtle and boisterous, and through it all run threads of irony and compassion. Consistently entertaining, *The Dining Room* is a fresh and original look at a sometimes gracious, sometimes stifling, thoroughly American way of life.

The Dining Room plays Thursday-Saturday at 8 pm. Call 226-3048 for reservations.



Sam Shepard's *The Curse of the Starving Class*, with (clockwise from top) Tim Streeter, Kelly Brooks, Peter Fornara and Carol Holden.